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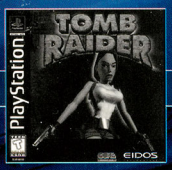

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net yaroze:

the tools of creation

Ever suffered through a disappointing game, while knowing you could have designed it better than the developers did? Now, thanks to Sony, you've got your chance. For the first time ever, players are able to create their own games for a console system.

But is Net Yaroze for everyone?

The Short Version

Here's the nutshell explanation of Net Yaroze: It's an affordable game development system that anyone can use to design and program their own PlayStation games. In theory, homemade titles produced on the system can be sold to an established software publisher, who might then take the original creation, polish it up, and resell it to the masses. With the Net Yaroze development kit, it's possible for an amateur to launch a career as a game developer.

This is all true—but explanations are needed. Several of them.

Chasing the Dream

Already available in Japan and Europe, Sony's new Net Yaroze PlayStation system puts serious programming power right into your hands. The heart of this system is the "Black Box," a special version of the standard PlayStation console. Yaroze programmers use the Black Box in conjunction with their own PC or Mac computer, a data compiler, and various development-oriented software programs. (For a complete listing of what the Net Yaroze package includes, see "Comes With Everything You See Here...")

Because Net Yaroze will sell for around $1,000, Sony isn't viewing the system (scheduled for March availability) as a commercial product and therefore, it won't be sold in retail outlets. To get a system, interested gamers must first become members of the Net Yaroze "club," then buy the hardware and software directly from Sony, either by phone or online purchase.

Obviously, the vast majority of gamers could not afford to develop games, because of the enormous budgets required to create and program console games. Nevertheless, there's no reason why an average gamer (many of whom have been playing since gaming's earliest days) couldn't come up with a winning concept that deserves exploration as a video game. It's this untapped pool of talent that Sony is targeting with Net Yaroze.

"Sony Computer Entertainment America (SCEA) hopes to restore the era that people can affordably chase the dream of becoming a video game creator," said Don Thomas, of Sony's Research & Development division. "SCEA wants to give them that opportunity. "

Membership Has Its Privileges

The word "Yaroze" (pronounced Ya-row-zey) is a Japanese idiom meaning "let's do it together" and that's the key to the system. In fact, it's more accurate to describe Net Yaroze as a total development membership package.

While the programming aspect may seem a bit daunting at first, there's plenty of help available on the Internet. Net Yaroze members will have access to on-line help via a World Wide Web site with dedicated support, file downloading, and message venues. Members also have access to the codes and demos other members have developed and are sharing on the online forums. Web site access is limited to one year, but is renewable for a modest fee, according to SCEA.

Minimum Computer Requirements

It should go without saying, but you do need to use a computer in conjunction with your Net Yaroze system. Keep in mind these are minimum requirements, and those seeking smoother performance should consider upgrading their systems above these specs. Minimum PC requirements include:

- **A 486 DX2 66MHz IBM-compatible PC, with one or more Serial Ports**
- **A 28.8-kbps Modem and an Internet Connection**
- **A 2X CD-ROM**
- **10MB of hard disk space, and 4MB of RAM**
- **An SVGA Monitor**
- **A Mouse**

(If you're running a Macintosh, you need *Code Warrior*, the complete development environment produced by Metroworks Software. Sony will be releasing more info about using the Macintosh in conjunction with Net Yaroze—check the next issue of *station* for more details.)

Reality Check

Net Yaroze is meant as a serious programming tool and not some kind of "deluxe edition" PlayStation. If interested parties have any doubts about their familiarity with the C programming language, SCEA urges that they not consider joining Net Yaroze—at least not until they're sure they're capable of taking on serious development projects. Nor should prospective users figure they can learn how to churn code while building their first game; Sony makes it explicitly clear that the Net Yaroze package contains no materials for teaching C programming.

Furthermore, there's no "trial-basis" purchase. Sony will back all manufactured products, including Net Yaroze's physical components, but won't make refunds to users who realize post-purchase that designing a videogame is no walk through the park or those users who lose interest for other reasons. In other words, once you buy it—it's yours.

Another caveat: Prospective programmers shouldn't assume they're going to be getting access to the same programming components that licensed PlayStation programmers use. Sony's commercial programming package is much more intensive (and expensive) and includes on-site assistance and on-call technical help, services which are not part of the Net Yaroze membership program.

The Net Yaroze system has some technical boundaries, too. The combination of game code, graphics, audio samples, and run-time libraries for any one game cannot exceed the PlayStation's 3.5 megs of RAM ▶

(because special drivers must be installed). Of course, when you consider that some of the PlayStation's hottest titles fit comfortably within that format (think *Ridge Racer*), it's clear that this is not a serious limitation.

Because of the many legal and technical issues involved, games developed on the Net Yaroze system cannot be played on other "regular" (i.e., gray) PlayStation consoles.

However, other Net Yaroze system owners will be able to check out your handiwork on their systems via Sony's online Net Yaroze Forum, and "amateur" developers interested in pursuing their prospects in the marketplace can do just that, provided they adhere to all legal restraints and follow the appropriate legal procedures of licensing and copyrighting in cooperation with Sony's guidelines.

Clearly, Net Yaroze is not intended for the casual PlayStation gamer, but for skilled amateur developers whose main obstacle to pursuing their ideas has been finding the financial resources to get started.

Net Profits

According to Don Thomas (Sony R & D), there were several reasons why Sony started the Net Yaroze program, like fostering good public relations with a specialized segment of their gaming audience.

"The advantage to them is the freedom to develop great things on a great video game platform," Don Thomas says. "The advantage to SCEA is multi-faceted, beginning with the goodwill it generates to make it possible for these people to be recognized in some way."

To say nothing of the potentially great games that could find their way to the PlayStation.

This, of course, is what's in it for Sony (In addition to the various cash profits to be realized from Net Yaroze): Right of first refusal on the next surprise hit game that comes down the line. For gamers, Net Yaroze offers an opportunity to develop for the PlayStation's enormous potential without meeting the constraints of a budget.

Of course, if gamers want to use Net Yaroze as a platform for starting careers in game development, it's important they consider the same factors that the pros face as they come up new games: popularity of the genre, concept freshness, and potential audience. The PlayStation has clearly upped the ante for graphics and sound; the result has been a trend toward engaging virtual-world gameplay that offers a wealth of intricacies, speed, challenge, and surprise. Serious would-be developers would do well to keep these trends firmly in mind.

Amateur programmers with stars (and dollar signs) in their eyes should remember something else, too: A significant percentage of commercially developed titles never make it to retail shelves, much less the best-seller list. So, while odds are very much against your game becoming the next *Doom*, hope springs eternal. And if being a game developer is really your dream, Net Yaroze could help you make that dream come true.

Remember, we said "could"—not "will."

"Comes With Everything You See Here..."

(Keep in mind that Net Yaroze is a membership package, and one of its most important components is *access*—specifically to the multilayered Net Yaroze network.)

Here are Net Yaroze's physical components:

- The "Black Box" PlayStation Console
- An R3000 C Compiler and Debugger
- A Comprehensive Set of Development Tools
- Interface Tools for PlayStation-compatible Memory Cards
- Software and Program Library CDs
- Manuals and Documentation (including a Library Reference)

(The Net Yaroze system package does not include library elements to accommodate linking cables, either for connecting a PC to a PlayStation or hooking up two PlayStation systems for head-to-head gaming. SCEA has suggested that Net Yaroze members will probably address this issue with their own creative solutions.)

"Sony Computer Entertainment America (SCEA) hopes to restore the era that people can affordably chase the dream of becoming a video game creator. SCEA wants to give them that opportunity."

—Don Thomas
Research & Development Division
Sony Computer Entertainment America

Hooking up with Sony

If you've got "programming fever" and want to learn more about Net Yaroze, contact SCEA at:

US and Canada:
yarozeinfo_scea@interactive.sony.com

Europe and Australia:
ps_yaroze@interactive.sony.com

Japan:
ny-info@scei.co.jp

(Sony prefers that inquiries be made via e-mail. After all, if you don't have an Internet connection, you won't be able to get much out of the Net Yaroze program.)

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